



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

fiscal years

2011 – 2015

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
& APPENDICES

NRCS STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan sets our direction and focus for the next five years and provides the foundation for business plan tactics and activities to accomplish our core mission and meet natural resource challenges and opportunities. It is the critical starting point for an integrated budget and performance process. The plan’s foundation is based on projected fiscal scenarios that have been speculated and forecasted within the context of present funding parameters.

NRCS’ core mission is delivered through one fundamental Strategic Goal, “Get More Conservation on the Ground.” This agency goal directly supports USDA Strategic Goal 2: “Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing our Water Resources.” The NRCS Strategic Goal is supported by the two Management Initiatives identified in the Strategic Plan.



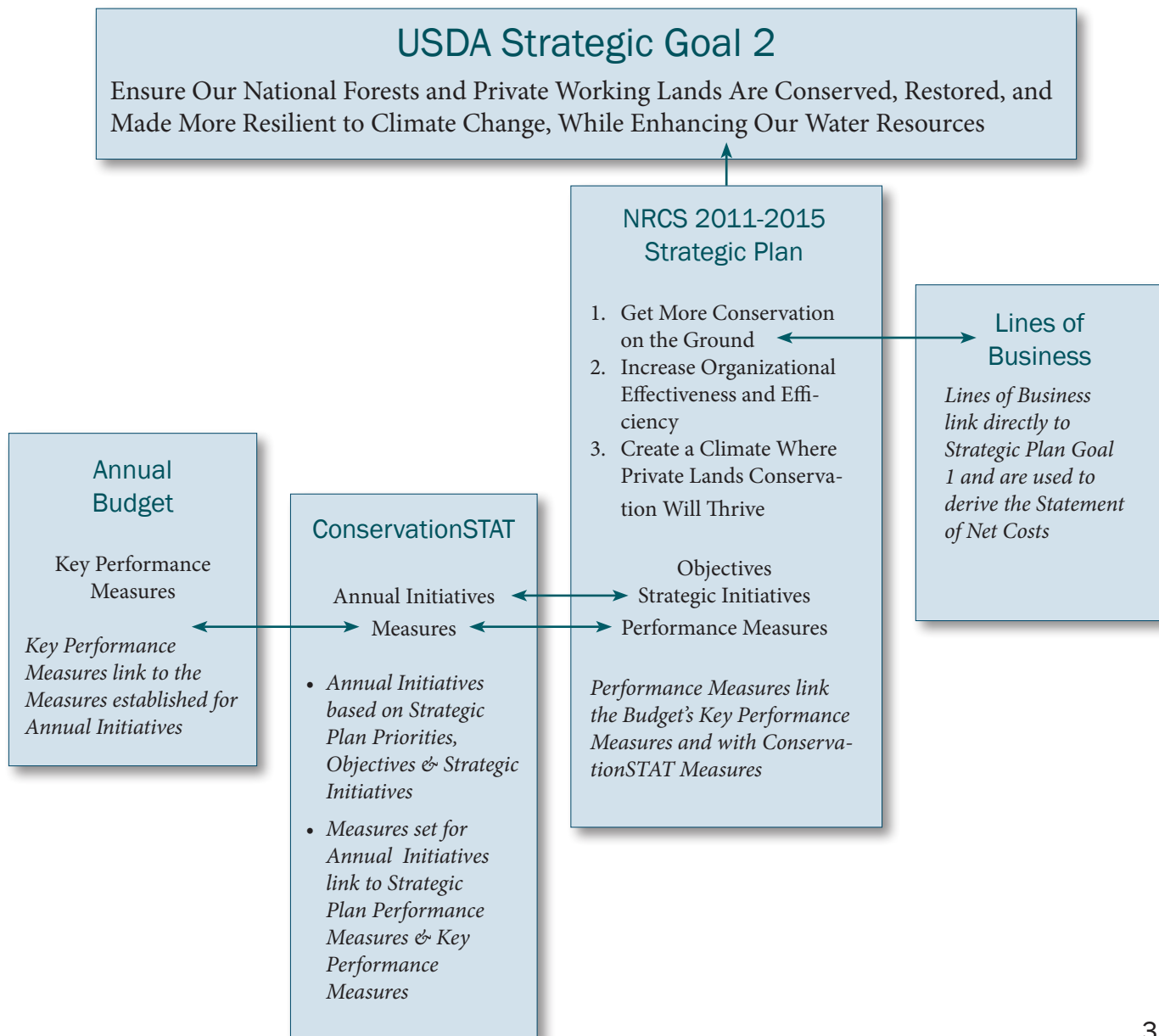
NRCS Strategic Planning and Accountability Framework:



The “work” includes actual activities that carry out our mission and the funding required (budget). The Framework is an ongoing cyclical process for performance and demand, in the form of actual on the ground natural resource needs and concerns, to drive budgets. Figure 1 is a snapshot of the framework and NRCS management “tools” used to ensure effectiveness and transparency.

NRCS STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

Fig. 1



IMPLEMENTATION

The Objectives and Strategic Initiatives within Goal 1 identify high-level strategies and means for implementation. Goal 1 includes six strategic performance measures to indicate progress. The tools and methods for Strategic Plan implementation are:

- A. *ConservationSTAT* is the annual business plan at the national level. It is used by agency leadership to effectively facilitate the implementation of the Strategic Plan. It identifies the specific actions to be completed in the short term and measures and monitors progress.
- B. *Key Performance Measures* (KPMs) provide direct indication of progress towards achieving Strategic Goal 1. Key Performance Measures are used in the Budget and Annual Performance Plan (APP).
- C. *State Resource Assessments* are the annual business and performance plans at the State level. These needs assessments identify at the local level the short-term priorities, activities, and resources needed to achieve conservation on the ground.
- D. *NRCS' Six Lines of Business* are used by leadership to view costs of similar products and services that Agency employees deliver to customers. The lines of business link to the Strategic Goal and will be used to develop the NRCS Statement of Net Cost.

ConservationSTAT

Approach

ConservationSTAT is a results oriented decision-making approach to monitor budgets, solve problems, address challenges and reach consensus to achieve results.

Data Driven Approach

ConservationSTAT is a data driven and results oriented decision-making approach to monitor budgets, solve problems, address challenges, and reach consensus to achieve results. The Annual Initiatives in ConservationSTAT are the high level cross-functional actions for the short term that will link directly to the Objectives and Strategic Initiatives in the Goal 1. Each Annual Initiative will have 1 to 2 performance measures is directly linked to the appropriate Key Performance Measure (KPM) as a short term outcome or a specific metric of the KPM. The specific actions with time bounded deadlines and responsible individuals are identified by Milestones and Activities within each Annual Initiative.

Progress in completing the Annual Initiatives, meeting the planned KPM targets and including financial status is reviewed by the Chief and Executive Leadership at regular bi-weekly meetings. The benefits of this approach include:

- Provides managers with routine timely data to make informed proactive decisions on necessary adjustments to performance or activities throughout the fiscal year
- Aligns the implementation of the Strategic Plan and annual actions with the budget request, implementation and reporting processes
- Allows for development of Annual Initiatives as a corporate effort and leading to a collaborative corporate model for improved capacity and future performance
- Aligns the implementation of the Strategic Plan and annual actions with the requirements of the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010

Key Performance Measures (KPMs)

KPMs are indicators of NRCS goals that are **Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely (SMART)**.

Quantitative Indicators

Key Performance Measures (KPMs) are quantitative indicators of progress in accomplishing NRCS mission goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely (SMART). Key Performance Measures are reported in the NRCS annual budget process and Annual Performance Plan (APP).

NRCS' current Performance Measures represent the output of key conservation activities (practices) in terms of aggregated amounts such as acres or number. This communicates the output of what the Agency has done but not the outcome of those activities.

To better express the environmental outcomes and public value of our conservation work, NRCS is developing science based outcome measures for each of the six performance measures for Strategic Goal 1. The measures will indicate progress in meeting the overall Strategic Goal. Performance specific to an objective or strategic initiative is linked primarily through ConservationSTAT.

Table 1 outlines the linkage between current KPMs and the strategic performance measures for Goal 1. The current KPMs will serve only as "proxy" measures until the improved outcome measures are developed for use beginning in FY2013. These current measures will have annual targets only for FY2011 and FY2012, no baseline or other long term targets.

Table 2 outlines the linkage of the proposed outcome based KPMs and Goal 1. These KPMs are tentative pending further study of feasibility to be completed by December of 2011.

Table 1.
Performance Measures (Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012)
 Strategic Goal 1 – Get More Conservation on the Ground

Strategic Performance Measure	Key Performance Measure
Maintain productive working farms and ranches	<i>Acres of cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality.</i>
	<i>Acres of grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base</i>
	<i>Acres of prime, unique and important farmland protected from conversion to non-agricultural uses by conservation easements</i>
Eliminate and reduce impairments to water bodies and help prevent the designation of additional water bodies to the “impaired” list	<i>Number of comprehensive nutrient management systems applied (FY2011 ONLY)</i>
	<i>Acres of land with conservation applied to improve water quality (FY2012 ONLY)</i>
	<i>Acres of wetlands created, restored or enhanced</i>
	<i>Acres of priority landscapes with high impact, targeted conservation practices applied to improve water</i>
Decrease threats to “candidate” and threatened/endangered species	<i>Acres of non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality</i>
	<i>Acres of wetlands created, restored or enhanced</i>
Increase number of conservation practice standards that address emerging issues (such as energy)	NONE
Increase conservation treatments in critical areas	<i>Acres of priority landscapes with high impact, targeted conservation practices applied to improve water</i>
	<i>Acres of non-federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality</i>
	<i>Acres of wetlands created, restored or enhanced</i>
Increase number of agreements to provide agricultural producers “certainty” that they will comply with federal environmental regulations	NONE

Table 2.

Performance Measures (Beginning in Fiscal Year 2013)
 Strategic Goal 1 – Get More Conservation on the Ground

Strategic Performance Measure	Key Performance Measure	Baseline 2010	Target 2015
Maintain productive working farms and ranches	<i>Acres of cropland with improved soil quality through organic carbon sequestered</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>	<i>TBD, Dec 11</i>
	<i>Acres of grazing land with improved grazing management</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>	<i>TBD, Dec 11</i>
Eliminate and reduce impairments to water bodies and help prevent the designation of additional water bodies to the “impaired” list	<i>Acres of cropland with at least X% reduction in pollutants in edge of field run-off to improve water quality.</i>	<i>TBD, Oct 11</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>
Decrease threats to “candidate” and threatened/endangered species	<i>Acres of quality wildlife habitat</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>	<i>TBD, Dec 11</i>
Increase number of conservation practice standards that address emerging issues (such as energy)	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>	<i>TBD, Dec 11</i>
Increase conservation treatments in critical areas	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD, Oct 11</i>	<i>TBD, Nov 11</i>
Increase number of agreements to provide agricultural producers “certainty” that they will comply with federal environmental regulations	<i>Acres benefitted from agreements</i>	<i>TBD, Sept 11</i>	<i>TBD, Oct 11</i>

State Resource Assessments (SRA)

SRA

State Resource Assessments are used to prepare the annual budget and KPM targets.

State Resource Assessments (SRA) provide “bottom-up” input for ConservationSTAT, and the budget and performance process, driven by the KPMs. Through the SRA, States identify for a 3 to 4 year period the:

- priority natural resource concerns and issues,
- priority conservation areas,
- type and level of activities needed,
- amount of operational support resources (funding, staff, equipment, etc.) necessary to accomplish these activities, and
- projected level of performance for each appropriate KPM.

This information is utilized to prepare the annual budget request and formulate targets for associated KPMs.

Lines of Business

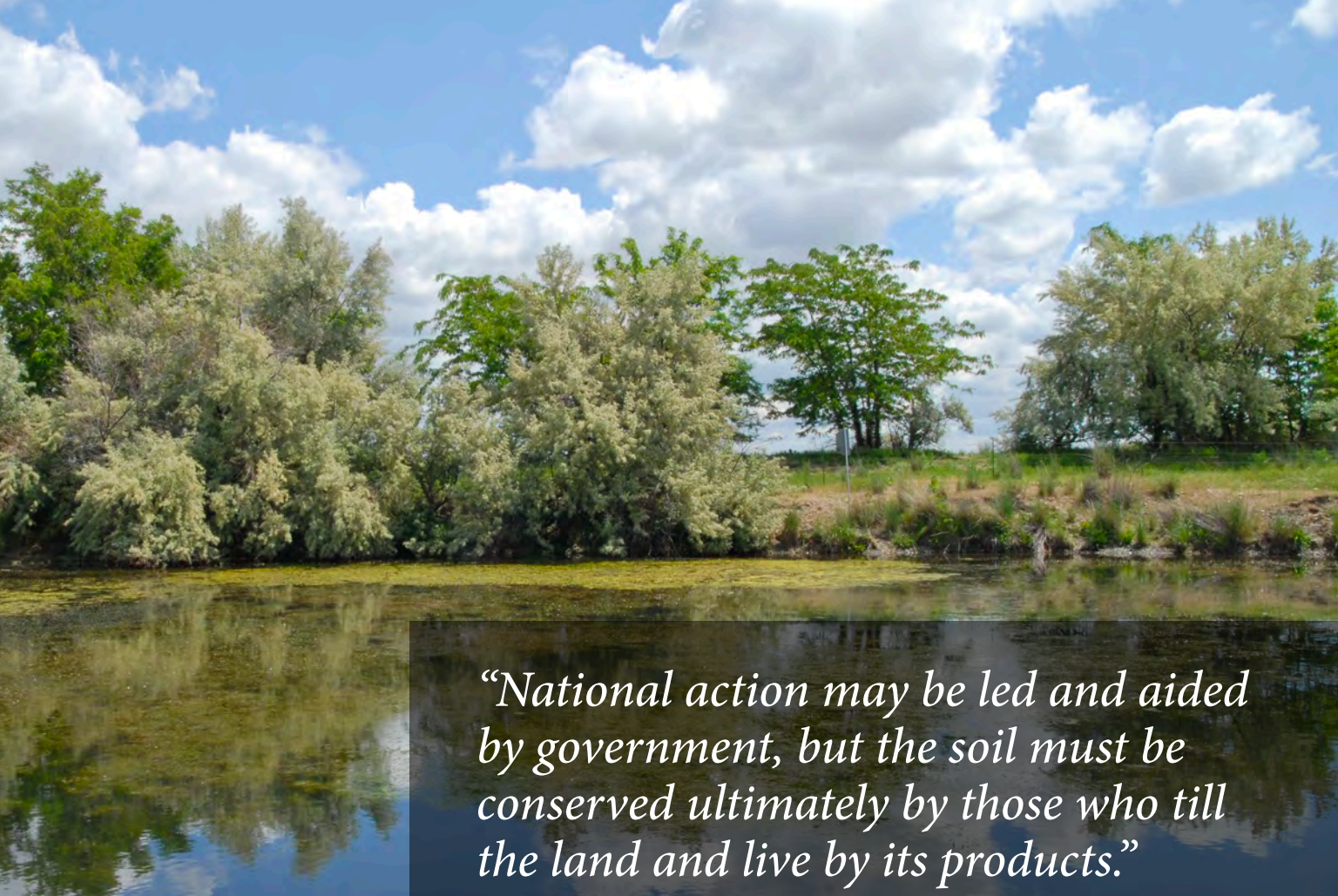
The lines of business link to the Strategic Goal and will be used to develop the NRCS statement of net cost.

NRCS Lines of Business

- A. *Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance* results in the transfer of data, information, or a conservation plan that helps customers protect, and conserve natural resources (soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy) within their social and economic interests. The planning process identifies natural resource problems and opportunities, determines objectives, inventories resources, analyzes data, and formulates and evaluates alternatives.
- B. *Conservation Implementation* assists operators and landowners in installing conservation treatments, management measures, and management systems that result in improved treatment of the resources. Implementation of landscape scale approaches and adoption of reengineered processes enhance implementation effectiveness by getting enough conservation applied on the land in a geographic unit to achieve measurable improvements and meet the needs of the individuals and local groups.

Conservation implementation includes monetary incentives through program contracts, easements, or other means to qualified program participants who participate in authorized USDA NRCS conservation programs. Financial assistance purchases environmental benefits and helps motivate producers to treat natural resource problems and to help sustain natural resources.
- C. *Natural Resources Inventory* is the acquisition and development of natural resource data and information for natural resource planning, decision-making, and program and policy development at multiple scales. Natural Resource inventory includes strengthening cooperation with other Federal agencies, State agencies, and partners to collect natural resource data. Data collected is utilized at varying scales and compatible with data generated by other entities.
- D. *Natural Resources Assessment* is the interpretation and delivery of natural resource data and information for natural resource planning, decision making, and program and policy development at multiple scales. This includes strengthening cooperation with other Federal agencies, State agencies, and partners to analyze natural resource data. Data collected will be usable at varying scales and compatible with data generated by other entities.
- E. *Natural Resources Technology Transfer* acquires, develops, evaluates, and transfers conservation tools, techniques, and standards based on research and new technologies. It includes the production and delivery of technical tools used in resource assessment, conservation planning and implementation, conservation standards and guidance documents, and the development and delivery.

NRCS focuses on ensuring that appropriate technology is usable and easily accessible to internal and external customers. For internal customers, the highest priority is the integration of field level tools into a user-friendly system that better supports the conservation planning process. For external customers, NRCS works to translate science and technology into tools that are easy to understand and easy to use.
- F. *Conservation Operations* is the ongoing cyclical activities involved in the running of the Agency to fulfill the mission of getting conservation on the ground. It includes information technology, human resources and services, financial management, and operational management. NRCS works to increase reliability and productivity of Agency resources and operations to deliver conservation.



“National action may be led and aided by government, but the soil must be conserved ultimately by those who till the land and live by its products.”

— Hugh Hammond Bennett, First NRCS Chief

APPENDICES

Program Evaluation

This table highlights some of the tools used to develop of Strategic Plan Goal 1 and the Management Initiatives.

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan			
Evaluations/Analyses	Brief Description	Effect	Date
Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) A systematic method of assessing the performance of program activities across the Federal Government. PART assessments help inform budget decisions and identify actions to improve results. Agencies are held accountable for implementing PART follow-up actions and working toward continual performance improvements.	<i>Watershed Protection, Flood Prevention & Rehabilitation Programs</i>	Score 65, Adequate	2004
	<i>Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program</i>	Score 67.5, Adequate	2005
	<i>Wetlands Reserve Program</i>	Score 66, Adequate	2005
	<i>Conservation Operations</i>	Score 83.5, Moderately Effective	2006
	<i>Emergency Watershed Protection Program</i>	Score 58, Adequate	2006
	<i>Resource Conservation & Development</i>	Score 61 Adequate	2006
	<i>Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program</i>	Score 68, Adequate	2006
	<i>Environmental Quality Incentives Program</i>	Score 72, Moderately Effective	2007
	<i>Conservation Security Program</i>	Score 35, Results not Demonstrated	2008

Program Evaluation

Evaluations/Analyses	Brief Description	Effect	Date
Government Accountability Office (GAO) Reports	<i>Despite Cost Controls, Improved USDA Management Is Needed to Ensure Proper Payments and Reduce Duplication with Other Programs.</i> A review of conservation programs to determine if participants in previous conservation programs were paid for the same practice in a new program.	NRCS developed a process to preclude and identify duplicate payments.	2006
	<i>Stakeholder Views on Participation and Coordination to Benefit Threatened and Endangered Species and Their Habitats.</i> A review of the effectiveness of incentives to encourage participation in programs benefiting endangered species.	USDA and USFWS to include mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on coordination efforts in the memorandum of understanding.	2006
	<i>USDA Should Improve Its Management of Key Conservation Programs to Ensure Payments Promote Environmental Goals.</i> A review of the process for allocating funds to the states to optimize environmental benefits.	Agency to link financial assistance formula to program priorities and continually update data.	2007
	<i>Beginning Farmers: Additional Steps Needed to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of USDA Assistance.</i> A review of the effectiveness of the key steps used by NRCS/USDA to provide assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers including higher conservation payments.	USDA to develop a cross cutting strategic goal and collect data to address the needs of this group.	2007

Evaluations/Analyses	Brief Description	Effect	Date
Office of Inspector General (OIG) Reports Twenty were audits completed on various NRCS activities from August 2005 through May 2010. Some were general and some were very specific in nature. The audit findings were used to identify areas of focus for the next five years. Examples of audits and how they effected the plan are listed.	<i>NRCS Application Controls Program Contracts System (ProTracts). Review of internal controls for granting and removing access to ProTracts.</i>	<i>Identified an ongoing need for internal controls to insure data integrity.</i>	2006
	<i>Review of Contract Administration at NRCS. Evaluate NRCS' administration of the acquisition process to determine whether procurement activity was conducted in accordance with Federal, Departmental, and Agency regulations, and whether NRCS maintained an adequate internal control system over the contracting process.</i>	<i>Identified need for financial internal controls and ongoing training in the use of automated tools.</i>	2007
	<i>NRCS' Financial Statements for Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009. An audit of the financial statements as well as an assessment of NRCS' internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws and regulations.</i>	<i>Identified need for additional internal controls and strategies to correct issues found.</i>	2009
Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)	<i>A USDA-led multi-agency effort to quantify the environmental effects of conservation practices. Model simulations suggest that adequate treatment for all resource concerns is rarely achieved with single practice solutions. Full treatment of the most vulnerable acres requires a suite of conservation practices.</i>	<i>Agency is reassessing the need for more Resource Management System (Whole Farm) Planning.</i>	2010

Program Evaluation

Evaluations/Analyses	Brief Description	Effect	Date
American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)	<i>Program Delivery assessment for:</i>		
	<i>Environmental Quality Incentives Program</i>	Score 80	2004
	<i>Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program</i>	Score 77	2004
	<i>Conservation Security Program</i>	Score 76	2005
	<i>Snow Survey</i>	Score 77	2005
	<i>Conservation Technical Assistance</i>	Score 79	2007
	<i>National Resources Inventory</i>	Score 57	2007
	<i>Plant Materials Centers</i>	Score 83	2007
	<i>Soil Survey</i>	Score 79	2007
	<i>Technical Service Providers</i>	Score 78	2007
	<i>Wetland Reserve Program</i>	Score 69	2007
	<i>Farm Bill Participants – Successful</i>	Score 80	2008
	<i>Farm Bill Participants – Unsuccessful</i>	Score 63	2008
	<i>Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program</i>	Score 73	2009

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan

Evaluations/Analyses	General Scope	Methodology	Date
Activity-Based Costing Assessment	<i>Estimate time required to produce products and services for Agency programs (by technical discipline at all levels).</i>	<i>Data acquisition and development of sampling frames for later updates.</i>	2011
Assessment of Environmental Benefits of Farm Bill Conservation Programs	<i>Develop capacity to explain and report quantitatively the annual improvements related to soil quality, water quality, air quality, grazing productivity, energy conservation and production, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration resulting from application of conservation for Farm Bill programs.</i>	<i>Standard modeling approaches acceptable to OMB Circular A-4.</i>	Ongoing
Program Evaluation of Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	<i>Identify new opportunities for improvements in achieving program purpose and evaluate program initiatives such as, Sage Grouse, and Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI).</i>	<i>Develop case studies and data collection related to program benefits.</i>	2012

Program Evaluation

Evaluations/Analyses	General Scope	Methodology	Date
Program Evaluation of Water Resources	<i>Determine whether water resources programs provide the planned benefits, are streamlined for efficiency, and are effective in meeting program objectives.</i>	<i>Standard cost-benefit analysis procedures.</i>	2013
Environmental Quality Incentives Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources Conservation and Development Program Wetlands Reserve Program Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program National Resources Inventory Soil Survey Program Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program Plant Materials Program 	<i>Conduct internal evaluations of all Agency programs to assess effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes and estimate benefits achieved, cost effectiveness, and extent to which customer needs and congressional intent are met. Reviews using OMB's PART tool will be conducted in cooperation with OMB.</i>	<i>Standard cost-benefit analysis procedures with more in-depth attention to specific activities in each program as warranted.</i>	2010-2015
Advisory Groups	<p><i>Water Resources and Climate Change Adaptation Workgroup and the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force provides guidance to the President with recommendations on climate change and water use effects.</i></p> <p><i>Interagency Task Force on Principal and Standards for Water Related Resources will change the way we fund water resource programs.</i></p>	TBD	<p>2011</p> <p>2012</p>
American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)	<i>Nutrient Management Program</i>	<i>Standard Methodology</i>	2011

Crosscutting Programs

This table lists the primary partnerships that will enable NRCS to reach the outcomes set forth in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan.

Cross-cutting Programs	
Federal Agencies and Offices	External Organizations and Groups
<p><i>Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Economic Research Service (ERS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Forest Service (FS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BR), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)</i></p> <p><i>Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA), Office of the Chief Economist (OCE), Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Office of the Inspector General (OIG), Office of Personnel Management (OPM)</i></p>	<p><i>Agriculture groups: American Meat Institute, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Irrigation Association, Crowell & Morning, LLP, The Fertilizer Institute, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Cotton Council, The Garrison Group, National Milk Producers Federation, American Farm Bureau Federation, USA Rice, National Turkey Federation, National Farmers Union, Strategic Conservation Solutions, U.S. Poultry & Egg Association</i></p> <p><i>Conservation groups: American Rivers, American Farmland Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Restore America’s Estuaries, Northeast-Midwest Institute, Ducks Unlimited, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Environmental Working Group, Sand County Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Federation, Pollinator Partnership, Environmental Defense Fund, National Association of State Conservation Agencies, land-grant and other universities and colleges, National Association of Conservation Districts, research partnerships (with universities and non-governmental organizations), Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D), State agencies, State soil and water conservation districts, and tribal governments</i></p>

Strategic Consultation

NRCS regularly consults with external stakeholders, including customers, landowners, policy experts, and industry and consumer groups regarding effective delivery of agency programs. While many consultations were not expressly for the development of the NRCS Strategic Plan, they impacted strategic goals, objectives, strategies, and targets. NRCS regularly seeks validation of all goals, objectives, and performance measures from stakeholders, employees, and the public.

Strategic Consultations	
Who	Purpose
NRCS Chief hosted two listening sessions with representatives from 18 agricultural and 21 conservation groups.	<i>To determine NRCS strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for the future.</i>
NRCS All Employee Survey	<i>To gather feedback from NRCS staff on Agency core values, emerging issues that will impact natural resources and the environment, and our evolving customer base and the services it demands.</i>
Consultation with the NRCS Executive Leadership Team.	<i>To provide input on Agency core values; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the next 5 years; emerging issues that will impact the agency for the next five years; and ways improve Agency products and services.</i>
Strategic Plan Core Team included employees from all regions of the US and all levels of the Agency.	<i>To provide input on the development of the Core Values, identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for the next 5 years, identify emerging issues that will impact the agency for the next 5 years and identify areas for focusing to improve the agency and delivery of products and services.</i>
Consultation with technical specialists across all disciplines, internally and externally	<i>To provide comprehensive environmental scanning of emerging issues and impacts they will have on NRCS, our customers and/or the environment. Assessment included both internal and external factors.</i>
Soil and Water Resource Conservation Act (RCA) held 21 national listening sessions.	<i>To provide input on the status and trends of natural resources on non-Federal land and assesses their capability to meet present and future demands, evaluate program policies and to give direction to USDA soil and water conservation activities.</i>

External Risk Factors

An environmental scan, completed by internal and external experts, identified the following external risk factors that may impact the work of NRCS and its customers.

External Risk Factors	
Potential Factor	Potential Impact
Budget	<i>The forecast for budgets in the next five years projects probable decreases in funding levels. Less financial assistance will decrease conservation applied.</i>
Economy	<i>The overall economy will impact how much conservation implementation farmers and ranchers will complete. As product revenues increase, costs of inputs increase.</i>
Climate Change	<i>In any given year, climatic factors impact how many conservation practices are implemented, both positively and negatively.</i>
Energy	<i>Energy sources and costs will directly impact conservation implementation. Some practices may decrease while others, such as no-till, could increase. Changing energy prices may also affect land use and nutrient management decisions.</i>
Increased Demand for Food	<i>Increased production demands will compete with conservation practices for some of the same acres.</i>
Demand and Competition for Conservation Funds	<i>Demand for conservation funds will continue to increase. The most effective and efficient organizations and programs will be funded.</i>
Workforce Demographics	<i>As the workforce ages, agencies will be competing for fewer employees to retain and hire.</i>
Customer and Farm Worker Demographics	<i>The average American farmer and rancher is aging, includes more women/minorities and is working off the farm more. New customers may offset losses to retirements but they tend to impact fewer acres. Immigration reform could impact farm workers and impact farm budgets.</i>
Land Demographics	<i>The number of farms is increasing while the acreage of each farm is decreasing. Due to the recession, the value of farmland may have decreased, resulting in fewer farm sales.</i>
Regulatory Environment	<i>An increase in regulations will impact the timeliness and success of conservation.</i>



*“Take care of the land and the
land will take care of you.”*

— *Hugh Hammond Bennett, First NRCS Chief*

PA-2030
October 2011

 
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